



The NFHS Voice



Performing Arts Programs Making a Difference in Lives of High School Students

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Friday Night Lights has been synonymous with high school football for many years. On any given Friday night in the fall, more than one million high school students are participating in the sport of football.

Those lights are illuminating other activities beside football, however. On those same fields are an equal number of students involved in marching band and other high school activities such as cheerleading, drill team and pep band.

During the week, students are participating in additional music programs such as choir and orchestra, while others are a part of schools' speech, debate and theatre activities.

These programs – speech, debate, music, theatre – are, in fact “cocurricular” in that they combine and complete the work done in the

classroom. Performing arts programs have both an in-school component and an after-school component. During the school day, students attend band, orchestra, theatre and debate classes. All competitions, festivals and contests then are held after school.

While these programs often do not receive the attention they deserve, the values of participation are just as significant and essential. As a result, a special week has been set aside to salute the students, parents, coaches, teachers, administrators and others involved in these vital activities.

The NFHS is in the second week of celebrating **National High School Activities Month**, and the week of October 11-17 has been designated as **National Performing Arts Activities and Local State High School Associations Week**.

Through these programs offered by schools and NFHS member state associations, students develop self-discipline and self-confidence, and they learn how to handle competitive situations. Teamwork is part of these activities as well, as everyone must know their part in order to achieve success.

The NFHS honored one such school earlier this month with its **Performing Arts School of Excellence. Salem Hills High School in Salem, Utah**, was the sixth school to receive this special award, thanks to its long history of success in eight disciplines – band, choir, dance, ballroom dance, debate, drama, orchestra and visual arts.

Salem Hills follows in the footsteps of other schools doing some amazing things in all areas of the performing arts. Rob Cuff, executive director of the Utah High School Activities Association and president of the NFHS in 2021-22, said, “Salem Hills is a tremendous example of the continued focus that USHAA member

schools have on creating a diverse, education-based activities experience for students.”

Efforts to enhance statewide performing arts programs continued last week as well when a record number of 82 individuals from 30 states and 15 national organizations attended the 22nd annual NFHS Performing Arts Conference in Denver.

After being limited to an online conference last year, this year’s meeting was particularly meaningful and included timely topics such as Digital Publications and Performance, Aerosol Research and Working with State Government Agencies.

Students in many states have opportunities to participate in a wide array of activity programs aside from athletics. While all member state associations are involved with administering athletics, 27 have programs for other activities, ranging from the more common activities of speech, debate and music, to offerings such as robotics, rodeo, creative writing, science fair, journalism, scholars bowl, student council, visual arts, film festival, chess, academics and bass fishing, among others.

Among the states with the most diverse activities are the New Mexico Activities Association, which sponsors 24 non-athletic activities; the Texas University Interscholastic League, which offers the most comprehensive program of academic competition with more than 500,000 students; and the Kansas State High School Activities Association, which sponsors the highly successful service leadership organization – Kansas Association for Youth (KAY).

Participation in these programs is often a predictor of later success – in college, a career and becoming a contributing member of society.

In a recent issue of ***High School Today***, Evan Margiotta, a former high school debate participant at Lake Travis High School in Austin, Texas, had the following to say about his involvement in high school debate:

“I know that graduating high school does not necessarily mean the end of participation in the forensics community. There is an expectation that competitors who graduate come back to judge, coach and give back to the community. Doing so helps give speech and debate a unique characteristic that separates it from other high school activities. When competitors continue to be actively involved in the community, it reminds everyone that the purpose of our participation in speech and debate is not just to win, but rather to provide the most meaningful and inclusive education possible.”

For more information on National High School Activities Month and **National Performing Arts Activities and Local State High School Associations Week**, visit the NFHS website at <https://www.nfhs.org/media/1016835/2021-nfhs-national-high-school-activities-month-campaign-booklet.pdf>.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is beginning her fourth year as executive director of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is the first female to head the national leadership organization for high school athletics and performing arts activities and the sixth full-time executive director of the NFHS. She previously was executive director of the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference for seven years.